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ABSTRACT

A description is given of the Regional Partnership Program, a field-responsive, center-specific model established at the University of Northern Iowa, designed to oversee clinical field experiences for student teachers. The model involves six regional districts specifically located across the state which serve as the administrative units for the field program. All of the centers have a common structure to allow for program continuity. Several examples of this continuity include: (1) every center has a tenure track professor who is the administrator for all aspects of the center's operation; (2) all centers have implemented a full semester student teaching curriculum; and (3) all center partnerships have established an advisory cadre of local educational practitioners, consisting of at least five professional educators from regional schools. Individual cadres are free to engage in projects they believe are pertinent to their needs. The center-specific component of this partnership program is designed to encourage creativity to respond to regional needs. Cadre involvement extends beyond clinical field experience activities because cadre members are involved in a variety of teacher education matters. Each regional partnership structures the student teaching clinical field experience in ways that best fit the regional district. (JD)

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NETWORKING PRACTITIONERS TO IMPACT TEACHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

Universities typically seek out practitioners and use school classrooms only to help train education majors during the students' clinical field experience even though this time is acknowledged as the pinnacle in all teacher training programs (Comfort and More, 1987). Outside of student teaching there are minimal contacts and few interactions between universities and public schools and their respective professionals. Such interactions can best be described as mere "marriages of convenience" (Smith and Auger, 1986). According to recent major reports on the training of teachers: the Carnegie Report, the Holmes Report, the new standards of NCATE and the F.I.N.E. Report in the state of Iowa, partnerships between universities and the public schools are encouraged to address the greater needs of both organizations. "The most promising partnerships are those that provide benefits for both professors and practitioners" (Goodlad, 1987, p.9).

The University of Northern Iowa (UNI) Regional Partnership Program evolved in the fall of 1988. This new collaborative partnership reshaped the university's long established field experience program. This reshaping was designed to bring the College of Education into a new and expanded relationship with the school districts, schools and individual educators throughout the State of Iowa. This new partnership was implemented with the single focus of making school practitioners more active partners in the teacher preparation program.

The new conceptual model involves the establishment of six regional centers. These centers are specifically located across the state in such a fashion as to cause UNI to geographically touch all areas of the state.

Each regional center includes a central office in a large school district which then serves as the administrative hub for reaching out to surrounding school districts. The immediate benefit is an ability to bring multiple school districts into the UNI network through the use of a decentralized decision making process. These six regional centers serve as the administrative units for various field programs. This allows the university to better meet local and area needs through a structure that is field based. This allows the decision making process to be more closely aligned to the activities going on in the centers.

Key Elements

The philosophy guiding the collaborative partnerships can best be summarized by four words: Field Responsive, Center Specific. Field Responsive addresses the need to develop some consistency between the six regional districts. From a university management perspective, all of the centers must have a common structure to allow for program continuity. Several examples of this continuity include: 1) every center has a tenure track professor who is the administrator for all aspects of the center's operation; 2) all centers have implemented a full semester student teaching curriculum; and 3) all center partnerships have established an advisory cadre of local educational practitioners. The cadre consists of at least five professional educators from regional schools. In specific ways cadre members participate in the management of the regional center, and in global ways they advise the university relative to matters related to the total teacher education program. Center Specific points out the reality that there are many differences in the activities of school districts throughout the state. Their needs can be expected to vary. Hence, regional centers are free to be different. Examples include: 1) individual cadres are free to engage in projects they believe are pertinent to their needs. The center

specific component of this partnership program is designed to encourage creativity and to respond to regional needs. Cadre involvement extends beyond clinical field experience activities because cadre members are involved in a variety of teacher education matters; and 2) each regional partnership structures the student teaching clinical field experience in ways that best fit the regional districts. This includes tailoring the semester of student teaching experience to regional district's calendars.

Components of the New Partnerships

1. The traditional student teaching program has been expanded through the use of a regional network. Students are still placed in specific school districts that were student teaching centers with UNI in the past, but now students are also assigned to other regional school districts. This expansion of the network allows for new student teaching opportunities while centralizing the administration process in one location in the field.

2. In each new regional district there is at least one professor who has overall responsibility for achieving the goals of the field experiences programs. The professor fills the role of "teacher educator" along with being a professor to the pre-service student teachers. In this latter capacity, the professor is responsible for an academic seminar that is an integral part of the student teaching curriculum and he/she teaches a state mandated human relations course that must be completed during the student teaching semester. Besides the above-mentioned teaching duties, the professors are also expected to schedule themselves so that they can fulfill the normal professorial responsibilities of research and service.

3. In the six regional centers, the university has purchased approximately one-half of the contract of a local school district practitioner. This individual is a clinical supervisor for some of the student teachers

placed in the regional center. The clinical supervisor is directly responsible to the professor who directs the program in that region. The clinical supervisor's main responsibilities are those related to the day-to-day supervision of student teachers, assisting the professor with student teaching seminars and fulfilling responsibilities related to the cadre (see #4 below).

4. In each regional center, a minimum of five classroom teachers have been selected to serve as members of a cadre. These educators, who accept an appointment for approximately three years, are helping create a network of practitioners who are in a long-term relationship with the university. Cadre members work closely with the professor and the clinical supervisor to provide input into the teacher education program on campus and provide leadership for the student teaching program in the regional center. Cadre members are paid an annual stipend for their contributions to the university's teacher education program. For the 1989-90 academic year 70 educators are on cadres that advise UNI about its teacher education program.

5. In each regional district, teachers are identified and trained to serve as classroom cooperating teachers on a term-by-term basis. The identification and training procedures of cooperating teachers are handled through three practices: 1) procedures are collaboratively developed by the regional cadre; 2) through the regular scheduling of the graduate level course, "Supervision in Student Teaching"; and 3) through the development of on-going inservice programs sponsored by the university in each center.

6. The college of education has assumed responsibility for establishing a special relationship with each cooperating school district in each of the six regions and with each cadre member. The nature of these

relationships are determined by the needs and uniqueness of the local school districts, in concert with the university. This includes such activities as the delivery of graduate course work and specifically requested inservice support.

7. A telecommunications network (Procomm Computer Conferencing System) has been installed. This system was developed as a result of two grants totaling a $108,000 from the Department of Education in Iowa. Through the use of four WATTS lines, regional professors and practitioners are computer linked with the College of Education, UNI faculty and other professionals in all of the other regional centers. A series of computer conferences allow all the field-based professors and practitioners to be networked through the campus' mainframe computer. The university has provided all the field professors with Zenith lap top computers which are modem equipped for this purpose. Computers and printers will also be provided to cadre members and the clinical supervisors by the fall of 1990.

This collaborative partnership program satisfies basic assumptions established for field experience programs and it keeps the "quality issue" clearly in focus. This model takes the best of the 65 year history and tradition of UNI's field-based student teaching program and incorporates a strategy for implementing the professorial role. The six regional centers combine the positive elements of direct involvement of practitioners in the teacher education program, while keeping the university in the position of providing leadership and curriculum consistency for its own programs. Finally, this regionally conceptualized model allows the university to maintain high visibility with a large cross-section of Iowa and it keeps the university in a position of serving the state through its professional relationship with practitioners.

What Does This Partnership Program Offer Professors and Practitioners?

1. At least 80 school districts in the six regional centers now have a closer working relationship with the College of Education.

2. A network of practitioners in cadres across the state now have an ongoing special relationship with the College of Education.

3. There are opportunities for professional growth through research and other collaborative activities between professors and practitioners in field-based situations.

4. There is a direct avenue for input from school practitioners into the teacher education program. Increasing the responsibility for practicing educators in the pre-service preparation of new teachers.

5. There are increased professional development and inservice opportunities for all teachers in the partnership school districts.

6. Local school districts can now better screen potential candidates for teaching positions.

7. There is an opportunity, through a state-wide, technological network, for the College of Education to assume a more pronounced and effective leadership role in the preparation and education of teachers at both the preservice and inservice levels.

The Regional Partnership Program Summarized

Most reform efforts do not fundamentally alter the prevailing organizations (Pajak and Glickman, 1989). This regional partnership program is an exception. Many practitioners in the public schools are in middle to late careers and have been teaching in their current schools most of their professional lives (Evans, 1989). In an attempt to give these professionals more participative decision making opportunitites and capitalize on their expertise, some school systems are decentralizing their administrative

practices by using school-based management plans. This model has recognized this phenomenon, and has built its organizational format around it.

To achieve greater depth in field experience programs, each regional center has established a working structure in a manner that best fits the school districts involved in the partnership. All regional centers have the following structure and programmatic components: 1) leadership is provided through a professorial line; 2) the clinical line (one-fourth to one-half time) involves the use of a local district practitioner to assist the university professor in providing supervision and structure to the field expertise program; 3) each regional district has a cadre of teachers who fill a supervisory, advising and resource role; 4) each center has a number of classroom cooperating teachers who provide the bulk of the day-to-day supervision as cooperating teachers; 5) each regional district has established procedures for implementing the student teaching curriculum (including a weekly seminar and the Human Relations component); 6) professorial activities (research and service) are expected of each professor serving the regional areas; and 7) each regional center is a part of a computer conferencing network which allows for communications between professors, practitioners, and students. The essence of these regional partnerships is that administratively and functionally the teacher education program is no longer more of the same. Unlike some school-based management plans where practitioners have little input in their areas of expertise, practitioners in this partnership can definitely make a contribution. They know the business of teaching and they now have outlets for sharing their knowledge!

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